

Warren County Board of Supervisors

Committee: County Facilities (*Airport*)

Date: April 17, 2013

Committee Members Present:

Supervisors Girard
Wood
Westcott
Mason

Committee Member Absent:

Supervisor Loeb

Others Present:

Jeffery Tennyson, Superintendent of the
Department of Public Works
Ross Dubarry, Airport Manager
Kevin Geraghty, Chairman of the Board
Martin Auffredou, County Attorney
Joan Sady, Clerk of the Board
JoAnn McKinstry, Assistant to the County
Administrator
Frank Thomas, Budget Officer
Supervisors Bentley
Conover
Frasier
Kenny
McDevitt
Merlino
Montesi
Strainer
Taylor
Mike Swan, Treasurer
Don Lehman, *The Post Star*
Thom Randall, *Adirondack Journal*
David Cederstrom, *The Chronicle*
Please see sign-in sheet for all others present
Nicole Livingston, Second Deputy Clerk

Mr. Girard called the meeting of the County Facilities Committee to order at 10:14 a.m.

Mr. Girard began by thanking everyone that was in attendance today and provided a brief history of the County Facilities Committee and how the Airport became a part of the Committee. He pointed out that eight years ago, the Airport was its' own Committee; however, he continued, due to a restructuring of Standing Committees, the Airport was put under the realm of the Public Works Committee. He stated that the Public Works Committee handled a significant amount of business and the meetings had become extensively long; therefore, the Airport was removed from that Committee and included in the County Facilities Committee approximately sixteen months ago. He noted the County Facilities Committee was comprised of five members, three of which were new members of the Committee. Mr. Girard remarked a culmination of issues regarding the Airport had been brought before the Committee which had led to a number of questions amongst the members. He said that during the budget process last year, he and Ross Dubarry, Airport Manager, had been advised that the Budget Team would be seeking reductions at the Airport and possibly privatization in the near future. He added Mr. Dubarry had been requested to prepare a detailed document of daily operations in order to provide the Committee with the proper information to assist in decisions relating to the future of the Airport.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Mr. Dubarry who distributed hard copies of a power point presentation to the Committee members; *a copy of the presentation is also on file with the minutes.*

Mr. Dubarry apprised the information provided was broken down into four sections, beginning with the 'Job Descriptions' for all staff at the Airport. The next section, he continued, was the 'Priorities of Work' which included a spreadsheet of basic maintenance and operation activities that took place at the Airport. He stated the third section was the 'Maintenance Area Maps' which visually illustrated the various areas maintained at the Airport. He remarked that the last section was the 'General Guidelines' that they followed when approaching Airport maintenance.

Mr. Dubarry pointed out the 'Priorities of Work' section was further broken down into three categories and he explained them as follows: the red heading represented the safety priorities; the yellow heading listed the priorities of function; and the green heading was a description of the aesthetics located on the Airport that kept the area presentable. He advised that each sub-heading under these sections were items that were included on the daily airfield inspection form. Mr. Dubarry mentioned there was a fifty-one item list that required daily inspections to ensure the Airport was in compliance with FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) standards. He reviewed the items listed under the sub-headings in detail.

Mr. Girard referred to the sub-heading Airfield Markings Signs & Lighting, Paint runway & taxiway markings, and he asked Mr. Dubarry to expound on that topic. Mr. Dubarry informed that the Airport staff painted Runway 12 and 30 last summer and had purchased eight fifty-five gallon drums of paint at a cost of approximately \$800. He noted if that work had been contracted out, it would have cost between \$15,000 to \$20,000.

Following review of the items listed under the safety category, Mr. Girard requested Mr. Dubarry to explain the inspection process of the required criteria as outlined in the report. Mr. Dubarry apprised that because the Airport maintained a Part 139 Operating Certificate, which was a safety certificate, the FAA inspected the Airport on an annual basis. He stated the inspection included the Airport's records for maintenance, records for training and the airfield. He acknowledged that other states had State inspection programs for their Airports that were not 139 Certified; however, he said, New York State did not and therefore any Airports in New York State that were not Part 139 Certified were not inspected by any outside regulatory agency. In response to an inquiry, Mr. Dubarry explained there was no punitive punishment for those that did not have a Part 139 Certificate; however for Warren County, he continued, if the Airport did not comply with the safety and inspection requirements associated with the Part 139 Certificate, the Certificate would be revoked and the County could potentially be fined. He added that any non-Certificated Airport that did not meet the FAA standards could be fined as well, or opened to liability of lawsuits for not meeting the safety standards in existence.

Mr. Montesi wondered if Saratoga County Airport had a Part 139 Operating Certificate and Mr. Dubarry responded in the negative. Mr. Montesi further questioned if it would be less expensive if the Airport did not have the aforementioned certificate. Mr. Dubarry said that it would not necessarily be less expensive, but it could be depending on the

level of compliance. He mentioned that the advantage of having a 139 Certificate was that it provided the ability to accommodate commercial service aircraft, public charter aircraft or any aircraft that had thirty or more passenger seats. He added it also gave the assurance that FAA safety standards were being met and provided a higher priority rating when applying for Federal assistance for grants. Mr. Westcott asked if the Airport had any planes currently flying into the Airport that could seat thirty passengers or more and Mr. Dubarry replied in the negative.

Mr. Dubarry referenced the Maintenance Area Maps included in the power point presentation which provided visual detail of the non-movement area maintenance, the snow and ice control areas, the buildings and the Airport Layout Plan (ALP) and he reviewed the maps in detail with the Committee members. He noted the ALP was the document that the FAA approved for the Master Plan which outlined the proposed projects that were desired for the Airport. He pointed out that there was no guarantee the projects shown on the ALP would receive funding; the items listed were those identified as potential projects and potential capital improvements. Mr. Dubarry added the FAA would not fund projects that were revenue generating projects; however, he informed the State had re-implemented a grant program for projects that could be used for revenue generating projects at Airports and the State had also announced \$7 million in availability to all of the Airports in New York State. He asserted each Airport was limited to two applications, of which only one would be granted, and a maximum grant amount had been set at \$1 million.

Mr. McDevitt questioned the motivation of the State to commence this grant program and the criteria they would use that would enable the County to receive grant funding. Mr. Dubarry explained the State had provided very specific eligibility requirements for projects and what the local share would be for an Airport of the County's size. He mentioned that these grants could not be used towards the local match for Federal projects, although they would fund many different types of projects that were not eligible under the Federal program.

Mr. Girard requested Mr. Dubarry to share the amount of grant funding that was received over the last ten years, as well as what the grants were specific to. Mr. Dubarry apprised he had compiled a list of all the various projects since 2002, which included the actual cost of the projects and the FAA and State shares. He noted the FAA had temporarily increased their share of funding to small Airports from 90% to 95% for approximately six years, during which time the County's share was 2½%; however, he said, that increase had expired and had returned to the traditional 90% Federal, 5% State and 5% County share. The source of funding for the Federal program, he continued, was generated from taxes on aviation revenue sources such as the Airport and Airway Trust Funds which was created by the Airport and Airway Development Revenue Act of 1970. He added there were several FAA accounts that were funded by that program and Warren County was funded under the Grants and Aide Program for Airports. Mr. Dubarry stated the amount of funding for the 2013 budget request was \$2.4 billion and the taxes came from 7.5% of the ticket price for air transportation, \$3.80 index per segment for domestic flights and taxes on aviation fuel. He pointed out this system was funded by users of the system.

Mr. Montesi asked how much grant funding the County had received over the last ten years and Mr. Dubarry replied the total amount of grant funds received since 2002 was

\$10,031,305; the FAA share was \$8,754,970; the State contributed \$931,422; and the County's share was \$344,422. Mr. Dubarry directed the Committee members to the Memorandum that he distributed which outlined all of the projects that the funding was utilized for, a copy of which is on file with the minutes.

Mr. Dubarry expounded New York State had released an Economic Impact Report in 2010 for the benefits of General Aviation in the State and he pointed out that Summary Report was included in the distributed packets. He explained the Report listed each Airport in New York State and what their contribution was to the economy and Warren County was listed at number 33, noting Warren County Airport generated 53 jobs; \$3.6 million in annual earnings; and nearly \$8.4 million in annual economic activity through the operation of the Airport.

Mr. Girard asserted at future meetings, the Committee would be deciding what avenue to pursue for the Airport, as well as more efficient and different ways to handle overtime and budget items.

Mr. Mason said his concerns were focused on two issues, the expansion and the maintenance of the Airport and he looked forward to reviewing the Airport budget line item by line item. He mentioned he had reviewed the Master Plan from 2009 and the Economic Impact Study that was completed in 2010 and he further suggested the County consider an independent assessment of the entire Airport operations and the long-term goals. Mr. Dubarry informed an independent assessment was eligible for a grant application from the State Aviation Program and it could include a marketing plan and a strategic business plan.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Lara Currie, small business owner and resident of the Town of Queensbury. She expressed concerns about the utilization of the Airport which had led to her and approximately thirty volunteers to circulate a petition requesting a public meeting on the Airport in order for them to better understand the numbers. Ms. Currie advised her business relied on a public Airport rather than a private Airport and they had enough trouble being able to be competitive by flying out of an Airport as small as Albany and they had considered moving their business to have better access to larger Airports. With regard to the petition, she continued, they had people as young as 14 years old and as old 87 that signed the petition and they had collected approximately 1,100 signatures. She reiterated that they would like to have a better understanding of the usage of the Airport and the ongoing expenses. Ms. Currie also questioned what the difference would be if the Airport changed the FAA Part 139 Certification.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Mike Smith, a private pilot who had been flying out of Warren County Airport since the 1970's. Mr. Smith discussed past renovations to the Airport which included a run-off from the runway, construction of a fence, re-paving of taxiways and construction of a new shop. He opined such renovations were costly and not necessary. He acknowledged the benefit of the Airport being Part 139 Certified but questioned if it was really needed.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Brian Straub, small business owner and resident of the Town of Queensbury. Mr. Straub stated he had recently become a licensed pilot and purchased his own plane and because of that, he had seen many Airports. He

suggested that many of the concerns that were being raised pertained to the difference between the revenue and expense lines. He expressed his opinion that increasing revenue at the Airport was just as important as reducing the costs. Mr. Straub added the Airport was a vital part of the County's transportation infrastructure and a part of the County's future. He advised the landing fee that was recently implemented was deterring pilots from fueling their aircraft in Warren County and the cost for fuel was higher than at neighboring Airports. He opined the Airport was a wonderful facility but horribly underutilized.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Fred Austin, retired Airport Manager. Mr. Austin apprised that the operation of the Airport should not be questioned, adding Mr. Dubarry did a fantastic job. He stated there were so many things that people did not know about the County's Airport and he shared past stories from when he was the Airport Manager. For example, he recalled a snowy, winter night when an emergency call came in questioning if the Airport was open. He explained that his staff had been directed to discontinue snow plowing at night and on the weekends as a cost savings measure. He said when the snow began falling, two employees, on their own time, went out and kept the runway and taxiway clean; and therefore, he continued, the Airport was able to assist the plane that requested to land that night which was transporting a heart to Boston for a transplant.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Mike McCabe, resident of the Town of Queensbury. Mr. McCabe acknowledged the Airport was an asset to the area; however, he said, he could not justify indiscriminate expenditures. He remarked that he had tried to gather information on the Airport and found it difficult to obtain. He recognized Supervisors Westcott, Mason and Strainer who had been able to provide him with some of the information he was looking for which he appreciated. He expressed his concern with the proposed expansion of the Airport and noted the importance of holding a public meeting.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Harrison Freer, resident of the Town of Queensbury and a commercial pilot. He expounded there was a misunderstanding about the benefits of expanding the runway, which he opined would provide the Airport with flexibility and a larger safety margin. He shared his past flying experiences, as well as his experiences with other Airports and stated the proposed expansion of the runway would keep Warren County at the top of the General Aviation Airport Structure and the second highest General Aviation Airport Designation that the FAA was moving to.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Don Krebs, resident of the Town of Queensbury. Mr. Krebs announced from a corporate standpoint, the County would not attract industry to the area if they continued to spend money on things like the Airport. He requested information on what it would cost to operate the Airport without the FAA Part 139 Certification. Mr. Krebs recommended reducing costs at the Airport or consideration of selling the Airport to a private enterprise.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Gloria Ford, resident of the Town of Queensbury. Ms. Ford informed she was the owner of a hot air balloon and loved the Airport; however, she said, she would like more information on the goal to bring in larger aircraft and the detailed flight plans for such.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Jon Mandwelle, County Taxpayer. Mr. Mandwelle expressed his support of holding a public meeting to discuss concerns about the expansion and the other plans through 2017. He agreed with Mr. Mason's suggestion of an independent study being conducted to determine the economic impact of the Airport. He recognized the County's budgetary constraints and noted his concern with how that would impact the Airport in the future.

Mr. Dubarry pointed out the runway extension would meet the Airports' existing needs and the primary justification was not to attract larger aircraft, although such expansion could do that in the future.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Travis Whitehead, resident of the Town of Queensbury. Mr. Whitehead remarked that he had signed the aforementioned petition because he felt this matter deserved a public meeting in the evening to allow more people to attend.

Mr. Strainer recalled that when the Committee compared the County's Airport budget to Saratoga County's Airport budget, they discovered Saratoga County had many hidden costs that were not included under their Airport's portion of the budget. Jeff Tennyson, Superintendent of Public Works, acknowledged that was correct and further stated that when reviewing the budgets line item by line item, they were not comparable. Mr. Tennyson further stated that some counties prepared their budgets differently than Warren County, as was the case with Saratoga County.

Mr. Strainer pointed out that the hangars that had been constructed at the Airport within the last few years now paid property tax, which had previously been lands that were not on the tax rolls. He added the Board of Supervisors were always trying to reduce expenses and provide opportunities for economic growth.

Privilege of the floor was extended to John Alexander, a private pilot. Mr. Alexander opined the issues with the Airport always seemed to surface during the budget cycle along with a campaign cycle. He recognized the Airport as a jewel to the region and he added local Airports were an integral part of keeping jobs in the area. He expressed his confidence that the County leaders would do all their diligence to reign in the maintenance costs of the Airport during the next budgetary cycle.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Doug Beaty, resident of the Town of Queensbury. Mr. Beaty agreed that an evening public meeting would be best for the citizens of the County to get involved in the decisions relative to the Airport and requested additional data be provided describing the need for an expansion of the Airport. He applauded the Committee members for holding the meeting today to listen to the public comments.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Shay Mason, resident of the Town of Queensbury. Ms. Mason advised she had assisted in circulating the petition mentioned earlier in the meeting and she noted that she did agree that the Airport was a great asset to the community. She added she had questions regarding the expansion and the return on investment and whether or not this was a sound fiscal decision to move forward with. Ms. Mason stated many residents of the County had questions and she felt a public meeting would help to answer those questions.

Mr. Mason remarked that this was a public meeting and all of the Committee meetings were open to the public. He asserted the issue seemed to be that an evening meeting was desired.

Mr. Taylor apprised this process had been ongoing for ten years, and all of the meetings had been open to the public. In terms of economic development, he continued, the County wanted to develop the Airport, and the surrounding areas, to its' full capacity. He pointed out that currently, the Airport Industrial Park had approximately 1,600 employees. Mr. Taylor expressed his opinion that the Airport was a tremendous asset.

As there was no further business to come before the County Facilities Committee, on motion made by Mrs. Wood and seconded by Mr. Mason, Mr. Girard adjourned the meeting at 12:09 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nicole Livingston, Second Deputy Clerk